

## INTRODUCTION

Located in Buncombe County, the City of Asheville is situated within the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. As the local Chamber of Commerce states, “Asheville is a city where the quality of life is high, the weather is mild, and the people are friendly.” The City’s location within the mountains adds to its beauty and charm and attracts visitors nationally and internationally. As a vibrant metropolitan area the City offers a unique balance between the intimacy of a small city and the economic and cultural features of a larger city. The Asheville Parks and Recreation Department (APRD) has contributed significantly to this fine reputation. The APRD is recognized nationally and throughout the southeast region as having highly motivated and professional staff, which provides quality recreational services for the community. The Department has a fine history of achievement for addressing quality management and providing comprehensive service.

Asheville’s system of parks can be traced back to the late 1890’s and 1900’s with the development of Riverside, Montford, and Aston Parks. During this time the main emphasis of the municipality was on providing quality services to the visitors and citizens of the community. The system continued to grow with the development of Recreation Park, McCormick Field, and the Municipal Golf Course. This was an exciting time for Asheville as the city experienced tremendous physical growth and economic expansion. The economic expansion was driven by surge of private and public investment intended to make Asheville a major resort destination in the country. Unfortunately, the Great Depression put an end to this surge of investment. The absence of capital and decline of tourism made the 1930’s a bleak decade. As Asheville tried to climb out from under its tremendous debt the park system remained stagnant for the next twenty years.

Asheville Parks and Recreation was established as a division of the Public Works Department in the late 1940’s. The system continued to operate at status quo for much of the next two decades. The Director of the Department at that time, Ms. Augusta Barnett, made tremendous strides improving recreation programs for the area. Without the luxury of having many facilities the Department was forced to use abandoned property from the school system and the YMCA to house programs. In 1971, Ms. Barnett retired and Ray L. Kisiah was hired as Director.

From 1972 to 1983, tremendous growth occurred in the development and improvement of parks and recreation facilities. Over \$5.2 million in federal funds from many sources were used to renovate existing or construct new park facilities. Federal funds were typically matched by the Department’s labor force with many of the park designs performed by Mr. Kisiah and the Parks Superintendent, Mr. Dick Meehan. After serving 23 years as Director of Asheville Parks and Recreation, Ray Kisiah retired on March 1, 1995. Irby Brinson was named Director on June 1, 1995 and currently holds this position.

Throughout all the growth the Department has experienced, it continues to be recognized regionally and nationally for providing quality service to the public. In 1994, APRD became the first municipal recreation department to be nationally accredited from the Commission on Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies. The National Recreation and Park Association and the Academy for Park and Recreation sanctions this program and it is a highly respected recognition.

The importance of recreation as a part of our everyday lives has never been more critical to the development of our society. The tremendous growth of recreation services on a national and state level is evident in the increased number of local governments who provide service on a

year-round basis. In North Carolina alone there are approximately 130 municipalities and 58 counties that provide recreation services. National trends indicate that expectations and demands for diverse and quality recreation service will only increase as our population matures. The elderly segment of our population will likely expand faster than any other segment of our society do in part to longer life expectancy and the aging of the “baby boomer” generation. As the elderly segment of the population increases in size, affluence, and education so will their influence on attitudes and perceptions of what recreation entails. Another indicator of how important recreation is to our society is the increased demand for recreation professionals to provide more programs involving childcare activities. These programs include after school activities and expanded summer camps for children of all ages. This is a direct result of the increase in two income households and single parent households who have children at home under 18 years old.

It is a foregone conclusion that the City's population will continue to grow moderately, placing additional burden on the existing park system. Additionally, Buncombe County residents will continue to participate in programs offered by the City and further use of facilities by this group is expected. Meeting the citizens' increased demand for additional recreation programs and facilities seems to be an ever increasing challenge for the City of Asheville. This is coupled with the fact that many of the existing facilities in the park system have now aged 10-50 years. As these facilities continue to age they will need to be replaced or significantly renovated, modified, and/or expanded. This is an appropriate time for the City to reassess its existing recreation programs and facilities and to formulate a comprehensive master plan which will help address future needs in a proactive manner.

The Asheville Parks and Recreation Department must be proactive instead of reactive in their approach to service. Historically the Department has met the challenge not only because the community demands it, but also due to the staff's level of professionalism and the importance staff puts on being the best. A well-defined master plan is one part of Asheville's approach to providing recreational service that will address recreation needs for the future.

## **MASTER PLAN PURPOSE**

The members of the Asheville City Council, City Manager's Office, Asheville Parks and Recreation Board, and the Parks and Recreation Department staff have recognized the need to evaluate the Department's facilities and programs and prepare a Comprehensive Master Plan for Parks and Recreation through the year 2015.

In June of 1997, the City hired the services of Woolpert, a professional park planning firm, to assist them in preparing a new comprehensive plan to forecast the recreation and park needs through the year 2015. Woolpert was assigned the task to evaluate the existing programs and facilities offered through the Asheville Parks and Recreation Department and develop new strategies in meeting future recreation needs. A key objective in preparing the plan was to extensively involve the public in helping identify both current and future recreation needs. Residents of the Asheville area actively participated in the planning effort by attending workshops at various locations in the City.

The main purpose of this document is to provide the City with an accurate and usable plan to guide its actions and decisions concerning:

- Facilities and programming

- Open space and land acquisition and management
- Partnerships
- Department organizational structure
- Major maintenance concerns for current and proposed facilities

The Master Plan report is organized into six major components:

1. Review of Demographic and Physical Information
2. Inventory and Analysis of Existing Park and Recreation Facilities
3. Inventory and Analysis of Existing Recreation Programs
4. Recreation Standards and Community Needs Assessment
5. Master Plan Proposals and Recommendations
6. Action Plan Implementation

## REFERENCE MATERIAL

Previous documents, reports, and maps were referenced in preparation of the Master Plan which provided background information pertaining to land use, demographics, and recreation planning. The documents reviewed include:

*Benefits of Local Recreation and Park Services*, National Recreation and Park Association, 1992.

*Recreation Today and Tomorrow*, Asheville Parks and Recreation Department, August 1996 update.

*2010 Asheville City Plan*, Asheville City Planning Department- Alternatives for Asheville Committee, 1987.

*2010 Asheville City Plan – 1989 Addendum*, Asheville City Planning Department- Alternatives for Asheville Steering Committee, 1989.

*Asheville Parks and Recreation Annual Report 1996*, Asheville Parks and Recreation Department, 1996.

*Asheville Parks and Recreation Maintenance Schedule and Operations Manual*, Asheville Parks and Recreation Department 1996.

*Economic Impacts of Parks and Recreation Resource Book*, National Park Service.

*Municipal and County Parks and Recreation Services Study, FY 1995-1996, FY 1996-1997, FY 1997-1998* North Carolina Recreation Resources Service, 1996,1997,1998.

*Recreation Programming, Theory and Technique*, Patricia Farrell and Herberta M. Lundegren, 1991.

*Asheville Unified Development Ordinance*, Asheville City Planning Department, 1997

*Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, National Recreation and Parks Association Parks and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Management, 1996.

*Buncombe County Department of Recreation Services – Capital Projects Plans,BCDRS*, 1997.